

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 COTONO 00782 01 OF 02 271245Z  
ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCS-06 L-03 H-01 HA-05 CA-01 SSO-00  
MED-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 /044 W  
-----006281 271300Z /50  
O 271200Z MAY 78  
FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 772

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 COTONOU 0782

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: CASC, DM, US  
SUBJ: BENNETT CASE: DEPUTY ASST SEC HARROP'S MEETING WITH  
BENINESE OFFICIALS

REF: A. STATE 133789 B. COTONOU 415

SUMMARY: DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE HARROP MET WITH BENINESE ACTING MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND OTHER SENIOR OFFICIALS MAY 26 TO DISCUSS BENNETT CASE. HARROP STRESSED US CONCERN OVER BENNETT'S HEALTH, CONGRESSIONAL INTEREST IN CASE, AND ASKED FOR STATUS OF CASE. MINISTER ATCHADE STATED CASE IS CLOSELY LINKED TO CORRUPTION IN STATE ENTERPRISE AND THAT BENINESE GOVERNMENT CARRYING OUT EXHAUSTIVE INVESTIGATION TO PREVENT CORRUPTION IN FUTURE AND RESTORE CONFIDENCE IN STATE TRANSIT COMPANY. ALL CLAIMS ARE NOT IN, AND BENNETT BEING HELD UNTIL INVESTIGATION COMPLETE AND JUDGEMENT CAN BE MADE BY COURTS. WHILE NOT BEING ABLE TO GIVE PRECISE TIME FRAME FOR END OF INVESTIGATION, MINISTER HOPED WORK WOULD BE COMPLETE BY JUNE 15. MINISTER STATED BENINESE PHYSICIAN'S EXAMINATION OF BENNETT DO NOT CONFIRM NEED FOR IMMEDIATE EVACUATION. THESE FINDINGS TO BE TRANSMITTED TO EMBASSY BY FOREIGN MINISTRY. HARROP CONCLUDED WITH STRONG PLEA THAT BENINESE SEEK SPEEDY RESOLUTION OF CASE. LATER HARROP AND CHARGE VISITED BENNETT TO INFORM HIM OF MEASURES BEING TAKEN. END SUMMARY.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 COTONO 00782 01 OF 02 271245Z

1. DEPUTY ASSISTANT SEC HARROP, ACCOMPANIED BY CHARGE MET MAY 26 WITH GOVERNMENT OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) ACTING MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ATCHADE, FORMIN DIRGEN ADJIN, ACTING DIRECTOR DEPARTMENT NO. 2 (NORTH AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS) KOUKOU, A REPRESENTATIVE OF INTERIOR MINISTRY, AND OTHER AIDES. AFTER INITIAL EXCHANGE OF COURTESIES, HARROP OPENED DISCUSSION BY STATING THAT PRIMARY REASON FOR COMING TO

COTONOU WAS TO BRING TO GPRB'S ATTENTION U.S. GOVERNMENT'S SERIOUS CONCERN OVER THE CONDITION OF MR. LEONARD R. BENNETT, WHO HAS BEEN DETAINED BY BENINESE AUTHORITIES FOR OVER 4 MONTHS. THE DEPUTY ASST SECRETARY STATED THAT WHILE THE U.S. GOV'T WAS NOT TAKING A POSITION ON THE MERITS OF THE CASE, IT WAS EXTREMELY CONCERNED OVER MR. BENNETT'S STATE OF HEALTH. HE OBSERVED THAT THE EMBASSY HAD TRANSMITTED TO THE MINISTRY UNDER COVER OF DIPLOMATIC NOTE A REPORT OF AN EXAMINATION CONDUCTED RECENTLY BY A DOCTOR FROM THE DEPT. OF STATE. THE DOCTOR'S FINDINGS SHOWED THAT MR. BENNETT SUFFERED FROM A MEDICAL CONDITION WHICH COULD NOT BE PROPERLY TREATED IN BENIN AND WHICH RAN THE RISK OF CAUSING IRREVERSIBLE DAMAGE UNLESS TREATMENT WERE PROVIDED. HE ADDED THAT IT WAS HIS UNDERSTANDING THAT BENINESE PHYSICIANS HAD ALSO EXAMINED BENNETT, AND THAT HE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN KNOWING OF THEIR CONCLUSIONS. HARROP URGED THE GPRB TO FIND A MEANS FOR PROVIDING TREATMENT FOR BENNETT.

2. AT SAME TIME, HARROP TOLD MINISTER ATCHADE THAT EMBASSY AND U.S. GOV'T WERE NOT WELL INFORMED ON CASE SINCE THE EMBASSY HAD AS YET RECEIVED NO RESPONSE TO THE FIVE DIPLOMATIC NOTES IT HAD SENT OVER THE PAST FOUR MONTHS SEEKING INFORMATION CONCERNING MR. BENNETT'S DETENTION AND HEALTH. HE UNDERSTOOD, HOWEVER, THAT OUTSTANDING SUMS OF MONEY PAYABLE TO A BENIN GOV'T AGENCY WERE A MAJOR ELEMENT IN THE CASE. IF THIS WAS INDEED SO, WOULD THE BENINESE GOVERNMENT CONSIDER PRESENTING BENNETT WITH A BILL FOR WHAT IS OWED, AND ONCE PAYMENT IS RECEIVED, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 COTONO 00782 01 OF 02 271245Z

RELEASING HIM AND PERMITTING HIM TO LEAVE BENIN. THE DEPUTY ASST SEC SAID THAT HE WAS NOT CERTAIN WHETHER PAYMENT WAS THE ONLY ISSUE INVOLVED SINCE WE HAD RECEIVED LITTLE INFORMATION ON THE CASE. HE STRESSED, HOWEVER, THAT THE GPRB SHOULD BE AWARE THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TAKES VERY SERIOUSLY THE TREATMENT OF ITS CITIZENS, AND THUS WISHED TO KNOW WHAT ACTION WAS CONTEMPLATED IN MR. BENNETT'S CASE.

3. IN RESPONSE MINISTER ATCHADE OFFERED AN ACCOUNT OF THE REASONS WHY SECURITY MEASURES WERE NECESSARY IN A COUNTRY WHICH HAD BEEN ATTACKED. THESE MEASURES HAD IN THE PAST LED TO MANY ARRESTS, IN SOME CASES OF AMERICANS, BUT THE SITUATION WAS NOW IMPROVING. U.S. CITIZENS COMING TO BENIN AS TOURISTS COULD EXPECT PROPER TREATMENT. THE MINISTER SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THE BENNETT CASE DID NOT FALL INTO THIS CATEGORY. HE SAID THAT BENNETT HAD COME TO BENIN AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF A NIGERIAN BUSINESSMAN, HAMZA, AND LATER HAD SET UP HIS OWN OFFICE IN THE HEADQUARTERS OF BENIN'S NATIONAL TRANSIT COMPANY SONATRAC. RECENTLY THE GPRB HAD BECOME AWARE OF SERIOUS FRAUD WITHIN SONATRAC, AND ON-GOING INVESTIGATIONS INDICATED THAT CORRUPTION WAS WIDESPREAD. BENNETT AND HAMZA WERE BEING HELD IN CONNECTION WITH THESE INVESTIGATIONS. THE MINISTER SAID THE MATTER WAS NOW IN

THE HANDS OF THE JUDICIARY AUTHORITIES. WHEN THE INVESTIGATION HAD BEEN COMPLETED, THE TRIBUNAL WOULD EXAMINE THE FINDINGS AND JUDGE THE CASE.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 COTONO 00782 02 OF 02 271255Z  
ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCS-06 L-03 H-01 HA-05 CA-01 SSO-00  
MED-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 /044 W  
-----006287 271300Z /50

O 271200Z MAY 78  
FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 773

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 COTONOU 782

ATCHADE ADDED THAT EVERY DAY THERE WERE CUSTOMERS OF SONATRAC PRESENTING CLAIMS FOR GOODS PROCESSED BY SONATRAC. SOME OF THE CLAIMS HAD ALREADY INVOLVED HAMZA AND BENNETT, AND THE GPRB DIS NOT WISH TO RELEASE BENNETT UNTIL THE WHOLE INVESTIGATION HAD BEEN COMPLETED. ATCHADE CONTINUED, SAYING THAT BENIN COULD NOT AFFORD THIS KIND OF CORRUPTION AND HAD TO PUT AN END TO IT SO THAT IN FUTURE SHIPPERS COULD DEAL WITH CONFIDENCE WITH SONATRAC AND OTHER GPRB AGENCIES. (IN AN ASIDE ATCHADE OBSERVED THAT HAMZA AND BENNETT HAD COME TO BENIN CLAIMING TO SET UP AN HONEST BUSINESS. INSTEAD THEIR FIRM HAD TURNED OUT TO BE A "TRUC-BIDON" -- A "BUBBLE" IS PROBABLY THE BEST TRANSLATION -- AND HENCE HAD TO BE THOROUGHLY INVESTIGATED TO DISCOURAGE OTHERS WITH SIMILAR AIMS.)

4. ATCHADE THEN TOOK EXCEPTION TO FACT THAT USG WAS NOT AWARE OF THE CHARGES AGAINST BENNETT. HE SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN PRESENT WHEN INDUSTRY AND CRAFTS MINISTER OHOUENS HAD READ STATEMENT OF BENNETT'S OFFENSES TO CHARGE. CHARGE REPLIED THAT MINISTER SHOULD RECALL THAT CHARGE HAD BEEN INVITED TO A PRIVATE MEETING WITH OHOUENS AND INSTEAD HAD FOUND HIMSELF AT A "PRESS CONFERENCE" FOR WHICH HE WAS NOT PREPARED. REF (B) STATEMENTS READ HAD NOT CONTAINED SPECIFIC OFFENSES, AND CHARGE HAD SAID AT TIME THAT HE HAD BEEN PUT IN AWKWARD POSITION BY BEING FACED PUBLICLY WITH QUESTIONS WHICH HAD NEVER BEEN EXPLORED THROUGH PROPER CHANNELS AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY LEVEL. CHARGE THEN SAID THE EMBASSY HAD YET TO RECEIVE ANY RESPONSES FROM FORMIN TO  
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 COTONO 00782 02 OF 02 271255Z

ANY OF ITS FIVE NOTES, BEGINNING WITH THE ORIGINAL ONE OF JAN 27, 1978.

5. ATCHADE SEEMED UNAWARE OF FACT THAT FORMIN HAD NOT RESPONDED, AND QUERIED DIRGEN, WHO IN TURN SAID THAT CHARGE SHOULD HAVE

TAKEN UP MATTER WITH PROTOCOL AND CONSULAR AFFAIRS CHIEF PAQUI. WHEN CHARGE RESPONDED THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY DELIVERED LAST NOTE TO PAQUI WITHOUT OBTAINING ANY SATISFACTORY INFO, MINISTER SUGGESTED THAT IN FUTURE DIRGEN AND/OR PROTOCOL CHIEF MEET REGULARLY WITH CHARGE TO KEEP HIM INFORMED OF CASE. DIRGEN AGREED.

6. ON MATTER OF BENNETT'S HEALTH, MINISTER SAID THAT GPRB HAD SENT EMBASSY A DIPLOMATIC NOTE CONTAINING ITS OWN MEDICAL FINDINGS. HE SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THIS NOTE INDICATED THAT BENINESE PHYSICIAN HAD NOT FOUND BENNETT'S HEALTH CONDITION TO BE AS SERIOUS AS STATED. (THERE FOLLOWED A DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE DIRECTOR GENERAL AND CHARGE OVER EMBASSY'S FAILURE TO RECEIVE NOTE IN QUESTION. BOTH PROMISED TO CHECK THEIR FILES. HARROP SUGGESTED MINISTRY PROVIDE ANOTHER COPY, AND DIRGEN AGREED IN PRINCIPLE. NO COPY WAS FORTHCOMING, HOWEVER. (WE GUESS NOTE WAS NOT SENT.)

7. DEP ASST SEC HARROP THEN ASKED MINISTER IF HE COULD SUGGEST ANY DATE BY WHICH INVESTIGATION WOULD BE CONCLUDED. MIN REPLIED THAT HE COULD NOT BE TOO SPECIFIC, BUT FACT THAT INVESTIGATIVE COMMISSION'S WORK COULD BE FINISHED BY JUNE 15 SO THAT COURTS COULD HAND DOWN JUDGEMENT). HARROP THEN REITERATED OUR SERIOUS CONCERN, STRESSING KEEN INTEREST OF PROMINENT SENATOR AND CONGRESSMEN IN CASE, AND ASKED MINISTER TO CONVEY URGENCY OF CASE TO PROPER AUTHORITIES SO THAT IT COULD BE RESOLVED AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE MOMENT.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 COTONO 00782 02 OF 02 271255Z

8. AFTER A SHORT DISQUISITION ON THE REVOLUTION AND ITS AIMS, ATCHADE SAID THAT GPRB WOULD SEEK AN ACCELERATED RESOLUTION OF THE CASE, PROVIDED THAT INVESTIGATION WAS COMPLETE IN ORDER TO PREVENT RECURRENCE OF POSSIBLE FRAUD IN FUTURE.

9. OTHER ISSUES RAISED (PEACE CORPS AND JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES) AND COMMENTS ON POSITIVE VALUE OF VISIT WILL BE REPORTED SEPTEL.

10. FOLLOWING LUNCHEON GIVEN BY MINISTER ATCHADE IN HONOR OF DEPUTY ASST SECRETARY, HARROP AND CHARGE VISITED BENNETT TO

CHECK ON HIS CONDITION AND BRIEF HIM ON WHAT IS BEING DONE.  
BENNETT SEEMED PLEASED THAT SUCH HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIAL WAS INTER-  
CEDING ON HIS BEHALF, ALTHOUGH HE UNDERSTANDABLY WAS SOMEWHAT  
DEPRESSED BY THOUGHT THAT HE WOULD NOT BE IMMEDIATELY RELEASED.  
AS BENNETT SAID THAT HE WAS WORRIED ABOUT HIS WIFE, HARROP  
OFFERED TO TELEPHONE HER TO SAY HE HAD SEEN BENNETT AND GIVE  
HER SOME ENCOURAGEMENT. BELIEVE THIS MAY HELP KEEP BENNETT'S  
SPIRITS UP FOR A WHILE. ASSISTANT SECRETARY MOOSE MAY WISH TO  
SEEK HARROP'S OWN IMPRESSIONS OF BENNETT'S CONDITION AND HIS  
PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS.  
THOMPSON

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 jan 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** CITIZEN PROTECTION, MEETING REPORTS  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 27 may 1978  
**Decaption Date:** 01 jan 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 20 Mar 2014  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1978COTON000782  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Expiration:**  
**Film Number:** D780224-1098  
**Format:** TEL  
**From:** COTONOU  
**Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Image Path:**  
**ISecure:** 1  
**Legacy Key:** link1978/newtext/t19780511/aaaaajbh.tel  
**Line Count:** 235  
**Litigation Code IDs:**  
**Litigation Codes:**  
**Litigation History:**  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM  
**Message ID:** 24713895-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc  
**Office:** ACTION AF  
**Original Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 5  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** 78 STATE 133789  
**Retention:** 0  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 30 aug 2005  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**SAS ID:** 2537919  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** BENNETT CASE: DEPUTY ASST SEC HARROP'S MEETING WITH BENINESE OFFICIALS  
**TAGS:** CASC, DM, US, (HARROP, WILLIAM C)  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**vdkgvwkey:** odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS\_Docs/24713895-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc  
**Review Markings:**  
Sheryl P. Walter  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
20 Mar 2014  
**Markings:** Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014